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CHAPTER XVIII.

OF THE WEDDINGS OF THE ABIPONES.

WHENEVER an Abipon thinks fit to choose a 583
wife, he must bargain with the parents of the 584
girl about the price to be payed for her. Four
or more horses, strings of beads made of glass
or snail-shells, a woollen garment of various
colours, woven like a Turkish carpet, a spear
furnished with an iron point, and other articles
of this kind, are paid by the bridegroom. It 584
frequently happens that the girl rescinds what
had been settled and agreed upon between the
parents and the bridegroom, obstinately reject-
ing the very mention of marriage. Many girls,
through fear of being compelled to marry, have
concealed themselves in the recesses of woods
or lakes; seeming to dread the assaults of tigers
less than the untried nuptials. Some of them,
just before they are to be brought to the bride-
groom's house, fly to the chapel, and there,
hidden behind the altar, elude the threats and
the expectation of the unwelcome bridegroom.

Let us suppose the Abiponian bride to have 585
acquiesced in her parents' wishes with regard to

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585 her marriage; without the observance of other ceremonies usual elsewhere, she is conducted, not without pomp, to the tent of her spouse. Eight girls hold up a beautiful garment like a carpet in their hands, by way of a shade, under which the bride goes, full of bashfulness, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, preserving a pensive silence, spectators being scattered around. After having been received by her spouse, and kindly saluted, she is brought back by her hordesmen to her father's house, in the same manner, and with the same attendants as she left it; whence, in a second and a third journey, she brings the gourds, pots, pans, and the weaving-machine, under a shade, to her husband's tent, and after a very short conversation returns to the house of her parents, where the bridegroom is forced to go to take his food and pass the night: for the mothers are so careful [591] of their daughters, that even when they are married they can hardly bear to part from them, and deliver them immediately into the power of another. After they have satisfied themselves of the probity of their son-in-law, or after the birth of a child, they suffer them to live in a separate house. These are the scanty rites of the Abiponian nuptials, which however are sometimes gladdened by a compotation on the part of the men. Sometimes a drum is

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struck by a boy seated on the top of a tent to proclaim the nuptials. The bride's being covered with a skreen when she is conducted to the bridegroom's house, resembles the Roman fashion of veiling the heads of the women, when they were given to their husbands, with a yellow or flame-coloured veil, whence the word nuptials.

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Gumilla relates, in his History of the river Orinoco, that there is one nation which marries old men to girls, and old women to youths, that age may correct the petulance of youth. For, they say, that to join young persons equal in youth and imprudence in wedlock together, is to join one fool to another. The marriage of young men with old women is a kind of apprenticeship, which after they have served for some months, they are permitted to marry women of their own age.

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